

ARDENT SPIRITS—MIDSHIPMEN.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

*Transmitting opinions of Surgeons of the Navy, in relation to allowing to the Midshipmen of the Navy of the United States, ardent spirits as a part of their Rations.*

JANUARY 14, 1830.

Read, and laid upon the table.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, Jan. 13th, 1830.

In compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives of the United States of the 25th of February 1829, the Secretary of the Navy has the honor to present the accompanying communications of Doctors Heermann, Barton, and Harris, three of the medical officers of the Navy, who, in pursuance of the said resolution, were required to give "their opinions, separately, whether it is necessary or expedient that distilled spirits should constitute a part of the rations allowed to Midshipmen; and, also, their opinion of the effect upon the morals and health of the individuals, and upon the discipline and character of the Navy, should each midshipman use the quantity of distilled spirits which now by law constitutes a part of the daily ration."

In submitting these opinions, the Secretary deems it unnecessary to add any remarks of his own, in illustration and enforcement of the views therein expressed, further than that they are earnestly concurred in.

It may, however, be proper for him to recommend a liberal commutation in money in lieu of the spirit part of the ration now allowed by law, leaving those entitled at liberty to purchase additional quantities of small stores, as more suitable and conducive to their health, comfort, and morals.

The Hon. the SPEAKER

*Of the House of Representatives.*

NEW ORLEANS, June 25th, 1829.

SIR: In respectful compliance with your direction of 25th ultimo, covering a Resolution of Congress under date of 25th Feb. last, requiring the opinion of three medical officers of the Navy, "whether it is necessary or



expedient that distilled spirits should constitute a part of the rations allowed to midshipmen," I do myself the honor to report, that youthful health and vigor are, under common circumstances, fully competent to undergo with certainty and safety the exposures and fatigues of naval service; rendering this stimulating beverage as an article of daily consumption, unnecessary. And as abstinence from it with substitution of value, or other article in the ration, would not exact an actual privation (unless as it might arise from a depraved appetite) the daily issue of ardent spirits is considered inexpedient. Since my earliest recollection, however, of that class of officers, in the year 1801, so great an improvement has been wrought in respect to this part of their allowance, from a moral impulse, that, in its progressive operation, the voluntary dismissal of distilled spirits from their messes might be reasonably anticipated.

"Should each midshipman (from his first appointment) use the quantity of distilled spirits (half a pint) which now by law constitutes a part of the daily ration," the effects would be in a majority of instances pernicious to the health and morals of individuals—subversive in the end of rational discipline, and dangerous to the justly proud and chivalric character of the Navy.

In support of the opinions here advanced, the following brief sketch of causes and effects, as connected with ardent spirits in the abstract, is also most respectfully submitted.

Mankind, concurring in a propensity of substituting delusive strength to limited abilities, a transport of feeling to the monotony of ordinary existence, and obliviousness to real or imaginary ills, have discovered numerous stimulating and narcotic articles of natural growth and artificial preparation; the product of which by distillation, in the form of alcoholic spirit variously combined, is the bane of our otherwise happy country. Producing a perternatural excitement of the internal coat of the stomach, its influence is thence extended by sympathy of action to every function of the animal economy; corresponding in intensity with the greater degree of vital energy of the digestive organs in early life, and the susceptibility of the nervous system to stimulant and sympathetic impressions. This exalted state of body and mind being succeeded by torpor and a sense of wasted strength, carried, (as a consequence of diminished sensitiveness to the influence of natural stimuli) below the standard of health, the renewed impulse to action by the next potation, (in removing depression or calming restive wretchedness) brings relief, and is eagerly sought: *thus, an article of luxurious enjoyment or gratuitous convenience at first, usurps by daily use the place of a real want, which, ere long, cannot be dispensed with.* But as a continual decrease in the sensibility of the system to the influence of artificial stimuli accompanies the habitual use of them, it follows, that, to produce the same degree of excitement, the excitants must be augmented, or the periods of taking them shortened; and in this manner the vitiated appetite for ardent spirits, at the expense of the natural balance between power and action, lays the foundation for habitual ebriety.

Without the establishment however of this formidable evil, *the powers of the constitution are enfeebled more or less by a more moderate use of ardent spirits*, and in the intervals of comparative exhaustion offering less resistance to the influence of noxious causes, favor (by increased predisposition) the invasion of acute diseases. And when brought under their influence and the remedies necessary for their removal, the chances of recovery in severe



cases of illness or external injury, are materially lessened, from sudden prostration of the system, and a want of reaction, proportionate always, to the degree of previous indulgence in stimulating drinks. Nor is it only a transitory increase of excitement and mere debility, which, under the habitual use or abuse of distilled spirits, undermine the constitution: for, as nature in no instance can be violated with impunity, the repeated orgasms of the nervous, vascular, and secretory tissues, give rise to local congestions and irritation, and a chain of morbid sympathies; which terminate in paralysis, in chronic diseases of the functions of the stomach and liver; or the eventual disorganization of the very structure of these and other viscera. And as, under the mysterious dependence and harmonizing condition of intellectual with physical existence, fatuity, or aberration of one or more of the mental faculties, and a perversion of the moral sense, are observed transiently to occur in a casual debauch, so the habitual abuse of alcoholic spirit, *short of that which produces intoxication*, gives rise to every species of insanity, and leads to the perpetration of the foulest crimes.

Destitution of self-respect, irascibility of temper, ferocity and foolhardiness, as also irrational fear and apprehension of danger, are incidentally enumerated as growing out of intemperance; and the immediate bearing which they would have on the discipline and character of the naval service, is too obvious to require illustration.

I have the honor to be,

With the greatest respect,

Sir, your most obedient servant,

LEWIS HEERMANN, M. D.

*Surgeon U. S. Navy.*

The Hon. JOHN BRANCH,

*Secretary U. S. Navy, Washington.*

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### REPORT, &c.

The subject of the following report is one, which, having received the notice it demands, by a resolution of the House of Representatives of the United States, leads to the hope, that such a step is merely precursory to a further manifestation, at the ensuing session of Congress, of its great intrinsic and collateral importance. For my part, I am not able easily to communicate, by any language adequately expressive, my own deep sense of the vital interest of the service, particularly, and the country at large, involved in the numerous bearings which this subject presents. Attached to the Navy, independently of my official connexion with it by a sentiment of exalted respect, predicated on my views of its national importance, and achieved glory, during its short career of trial, I hope I shall be excused, if I shall be judged to have weighed, in too nicely balanced and sensitive scales, and with too keen an eye, and too fastidious a hand, the preponderating effects of intemperateness, or bad habits, or immorality of any kind in the Navy, against its usefulness and reputation.

It is possible I may have overrated the ill consequences of irregular habits. If this shall be believed, my apology must be looked for in the high, nay inestimable price at which I rate the marine bulwark of our nation's honor, independence, and commercial strength; and the low estimate I confess I have



ever set on practices unmanly, because degrading, and clearly fraught with the power and unerring tendency to sap the foundation of that bulwark. However truly or incorrectly I may be found to have canvassed the merits of the question under notice; however fairly or irrationally contrasted the chances of probable evil with certain good; the process by which I have arrived at the only issue I can judge to be fair and legitimate, will be perceived in the consideration I have given of the six following queries; by the facts and reasoning embodied in which, this report must be tested in examining the value of any opinions it contains. It is due to these opinions to say, that they are not recently embraced, or indited without due deliberation. More than twenty years have I entertained them. During this period I have not seen the least reason for impugning their validity; but, on the contrary, have met with continued corroboration of their truth, by the professional experience enjoyed in the course of that time.

First, the necessity of the spirituous item of the present ration; in other words, its indispensableness to the subsistence, health, and comfort of midshipmen.

In my apprehension, the necessity in question could only rationally be supposed to exist from the fact, ascertained beyond the possibility of dispute or denial, that, where distilled spirit had not been used daily, or very frequently, by midshipmen exposed in the usual diversity of climes, to the ordinary duty performed by this class of officers, injury to the health and constitution, a want of essential comfort, and difficulty, if not impossibility, of subsisting on the residue of the ration without it, had universally been the consequence. Is this the case? So far from it, those who have abstained altogether from spirituous liquor, have enjoyed quite as good health as those who habitually used it; have digested their food as well; enjoyed as much of what may be denominated essential comfort; have borne the toils of duty as well; executed their orders as efficiently, and that with more equanimity of temper; have been as happy; in a word, felt not the want of that, the fancied benefit of which, habit had not taught them to crave, and principle had deterred them from resorting to. Besides, in event of illness from inflammatory diseases, those who abstain altogether from the use of spirit, or are very temperate in its use, are, for the most part, more easily treated by medical *regime*, than those accustomed to drink freely of distilled liquors of any kind. The spirituous portion of the ration, then, cannot be considered indispensable, on the only sufficient grounds which could make it so. There are no facts within my knowledge, presented either by my own experience, or that of other medical men, imperatively directing the use of distilled spirit by young men performing duty as midshipmen under ordinary circumstances, on ship-board, or shore; and I can conceive of none justifying it in the diet of boys and striplings, who for the most part perform this duty. *My opinion is, therefore, that it is not necessary that distilled spirit should constitute a part of the ration allowed to midshipmen.*

Secondly, the expediency which involves the idea of the continued usefulness or occasional benefit of ardent spirit in the diet of young officers. It could only be expedient to permit the use, daily of ardent spirit, just said not to be necessary, from some known facts, sufficiently important and undeniable, respecting the usefulness or signal advantage resulting from its employment, as a dietetic item, under circumstances incidental to the duty of midshipmen, of unusual occurrence, or extraordinarily adverse to health. Such duty they are liable to perform in insalubrious climates. It might also



be supposed expedient to use distilled spirit as a prophylactic, during unavoidable exposure to common climates, at seasons of the year, or periods of the day or night, particularly unfavorable to the preservation of health. And some would perhaps deem it expedient in case of slight sickness from inclement weather. In these cases, also, the argument of expediency could only be sustained by irrefragable facts. Naval medical writings record no such facts as those just said to be requisite to substantiate expediency in all the preceding circumstances. Neither are any such furnished by my experience, nor even within my knowledge. Experience is in favor of warm dietetic beverages, in all the preceding cases, in preference to distilled spirit; such as cocoa, chocolate, tea, coffee, and surrogate,\* (or cichory) or even gruel; which, besides being sufficiently stimulant, convey nourishment to the system; and, taken at sea, or in port, by officers and crews going on duty such as alluded to, have never been known to have been followed by evil consequences. This cannot be said of distilled spirits. The beverages mentioned, therefore, are better safeguards to health, under undue exposure to unhealthful weather in climates of ordinary character; or under circumstances of unavoidable exposure to the pernicious effects of night air and dews, in climes naturally inauspicious to health. In event of actual sickness, from any cause, during which the condition of the individual may call for the use of distilled spirit, the hospital store-room of the medical officer, which always contains spirit of a better quality than that laid in for ships' use, besides wine, porter, and the ingredients for lemonade, is open to the prescribed and therefore judicious use of those who, in the opinion of the medical controller of that store, actually require, or would in anywise be benefitted by either. *In my opinion, therefore, it cannot be expedient that distilled spirit should constitute a part of the ration allowed to midshipmen.*

Thirdly, the effect upon the morals of the individuals, should each midshipmen daily use his lawful allowance of spirit? This involves the question, whether the habitual use of what may truly be deemed by all who reflect seriously on the subject, with reference to its secondary consequences, as well as primary effects, an immoderate portion of spirituous liquor has any permanent effect on the moral condition of boys, striplings, and young men?

The consideration of this question leads to the inquiry, whether the habitual excitement, by any unnecessary or dispensable stimulous of diet, of those natural passions, the tone of which is sufficiently elevated in youth, without adventitious aid, be prejudicial to the steadfastness or subversive altogether of moral restraint? In other words, whether the preservation in strength and vigor of all those upright principles which mark the moral man, is in any degree dependent on, or responsive to, the condition of the physical system at that period of life, when strength in moral rectitude and honor is incipient, and good habits in the forming stage? All these questions deserve an affirmative answer, both by deductions from experience, and by reasoning from the moral constitution of man, and its known susceptibilities of impression by physical and habitual agents. Such an answer too, is corroborated by the observation of all those who have directed their attention to the waywardness of temper, and contrarieties of disposition incidental to youth. If these conspire to disturb the moral quietude of individuals, at a

\* A substitute for coffee, prepared from the root of the cichorium entybus, or sucerey, extensively cultivated in Europe.



period of life when the passions are sportive and irregular at best, and are called into the daily power of disturbing that quietude, by the incitement of any such natural agent as liquid stimulus, acting on the physical constitution by the reiteration of diurnal use, can it be doubted that injury to the moral system will result from such habitual stimulation?

If this injury shall not in all instances happen to occur, the exceptions will be, though not purely fortuitous, yet of no frequent occurrence; and owing to causes readily brought into view. The moral obduracy calculated to withstand the destructive habit in question, may either arise from early educational direction when the passions and disposition have naturally been irregular, or be owing to a moral system, habitually or from nature, unyielding to physical impressions. The individuals, therefore, who may be exempt from the contaminating and destructive influence alluded to, will be only those who enjoy the rare blessings among youth, of habitual discipline of the temper and command of the passions, under circumstances of whatever nature, calculated to worry or rouse the one, or call into frequent action, or exasperate the other. It will readily be conceded, they will be a small proportion of whatever number of youths may be gregariously met, either in the Navy or elsewhere. The individuals, less happily gifted by natural constitution, or early discipline of temper, and dominion of the passions, who may be injuriously affected by the causes, and in the manner already mentioned, will be sufficiently numerous to *justify the appellation of demoralizing habit to the daily use of such quantity of ardent spirit as now by law constitutes part of the rations for midshipmen whenever they draw them in kind.* The foregoing remarks have reference solely to that established quantity, supposing it be consumed; assuming as a postulate for the present, that the quantity may not be considered excessive, nor the daily use of it esteemed intemperateness, an opinion in which, for one, I am not inclined to acquiesce, except for argument's sake at this time. But even under this favorable supposition, the truth of which is at least very problematical, who shall say that the use of distilled spirits will end with this questionable point of moderation? Who shall confidently say when, and in how many instances of a given number of individuals of this class, particularly the younger portion, the daily use, under the approbation of *legal acquiescence* in the propriety and utility of *so much*, may not beget a love for *more*? This additional quantity will seem to be required, as the system of the individuals shall become by habit less sensibly affected by the accustomed portion, at least to his own feelings, though actually suffering under its use in the eye of a common observer, as well as that of the medical attendant on ship-board.

Who can say in how many instances of a given number of youths, many of them actually in a state of physical infancy, and most in that unsteady state of corporeal and moral vigor immediately preceding puberty, and for some time continuing thereafter, shall not yield to a want of discretion incident to their age; and a vacillation of constitutional strength, at the epoch of life alluded to, and become absolutely intemperate, by the use of more liquor than that allowed by law in their rations?

Who shall say, that this poison, legally directed as part of their daily sustenance, shall not number among the victims of its insidious and deleterious power, many a fine youth, who, but for this temptation, would have been guilty of no aberration from rigid temperance, but who, seduced by example, urged by solicitation, and, above all, encouraged by the apologetic



reflection that what the law allows, if it do not actually direct coercively the use of, must be proper—yields to the conspiring influence of all those evil incentives; thus becoming morally, and often intellectually debased, at an age so young as to preclude the idea of any other result than confirmation in this detestable vice? The instances of reformation are so few, in my belief, after early intemperance, as by their rarity alone, to strengthen the demoralizing character of a habit, which, in its due course of confirmation and long continuance, levels alike the educated and the gifted, the moral and the honorable, the chivalric and the brave, the intrepid and the magnanimous, the courteous and the gallant, to one state of grovelling prostration and enthralling vice.

This degraded state of man presents a picture, revolting as it is, which may not indeed be heightened in coloring, but rendered more glaringly shocking by shewing it to military men in another light. In this view, and but a little in the perspective, which, in its turn, as the bonded slave to liquor travels onward, will be bold foreground, we see moral and physical imbecility, meanness, pusillanimity, filthiness, fatuity, and brutishness! This picture I have drawn from life. Many have I seen of whom it is a just resemblance. A similar striking portrait of their morbid condition and death, is to be had from the pencil of any physician who has seen (and what physician has not?) the pitiable state of sots, in their deplorable misery. I have often witnessed their sufferings, no less agonizing than their degradation was shocking: in vain was the medicinal chalice offered to appease them; it contained not, it cannot contain, any remedy for them; in vain was it emptied, after being filled to the brim with narcotic drugs, with the yearning expectation of inducing sleep—no oblivious or soothing essence do these drugs any longer hold, when administered to the sot. Vigilance, morbid, painful, maddening—unceasing, irremediable vigilance, is the doom of every drunkard, sooner or later; but it is the mere precursor of the wreck of intellect. Measuring the distress it occasions, it is as a mere spark to the full blaze of a raging fire compared to the frightful mania which supervenes; a mania, grounded on the destruction of nervous energy, and thence, of that timid, nay, cowardly kind, which sees harm in every object, and danger in the presence of every friend; a mania, during the short continuance of which, for it soon runs a fatal course, the wretched victim is haunted by all the horrid ills a disordered imagination can present, as constituting the climax of human misery. Fire, falling walls, furies, threatening violent death, are constantly in his view. On the naked sides of his chamber, or within the curtains of his bed, are pictured to his sight all sorts of terrific images. They often drive him to leap from a window, or commit suicide, to avoid what he deems torture worse than death—their demoniacal sports in his disordered brain! or, bemoaning his fate, fleeing from his persecutors and tormentors, imploringly deprecating the wrath, convulsively and despairingly, but feebly withal, contending against them, he dies in tremors, exhaustion, and agony!

How often has this catastrophe blighted the hopes of many a meritorious parent, in his beloved offspring devoted to the naval service! How cruelly has he been frustrated, after years of solicitude and unceasing lessons on temperance, by a conspiracy of causes and seductive examples, hostile to that virtue; one of the most active of which, and, consequently, several growing mainly out of it, might be removed by a new law, rigidly enforced according to its letter and virtual intention. Such a law would, under such



execution of it, secure the health, save the lives, and preserve to the country the efficient services of those of her officers, who might, without it, fall victims to intemperance. The devastating effects of this vice, should it prevail to any general extent, would prove more destructive to her naval sons (I do not say that it has done so) than unhealthful climes, the chances of the seas, the accidents incident to the service, if not even than warfare itself! I believe, conscientiously, that the country has been deprived of the services of many a youth, born to reap honor and glory in her cause, owing to the inviting circumstance and daily temptation already mentioned, having led him unwarily from his duty, his fame, and his happiness, to pursue that course so eloquently depicted by Shakspeare:

“To be now a sensible man, and by and by a fool, and presently a beast! Oh, strange!”

I have as yet refrained from dwelling on the question, whether the quantity of liquor now allowed, by law, as an integrant of the ration which may be drawn by midshipmen, be within due and safe bounds of moderation? yet, as this quantity may legally be drawn daily, by these officers, there being no lawful reason to prevent it, if they shall choose to do so, it may not be without use to inquire whether the quantity be too great or otherwise? It has just been said it is optional with midshipmen to draw their rations. This is, at least, frequently the fact, and is often done. I shall, in the sequel, notice that the commander of a ship sometimes prohibits this. But I am inclined to think that those who may come under the prohibitory regulation, may deem their commander to be illegally interfering with their lawful rights; or unkindly distrusting their moral habits or discretion, by interdicting such drawing, in kind, of the ration and spirit apportioned to it by law. The inquiry just instituted, therefore, may appear the more proper, seeing that midshipmen may, and in fact often do, draw their rations entire, no interdict of their commander existing to prevent their doing so. In any attempt to give an opinion on this point of quantity, we are immediately met by difficulties and contrarieties, neither easily set aside nor reconciled. I admit the difficulty of graduating such a potent stimulus as distilled spirit to the various ages, constitutions, tempers, and health of individuals, constituting the grade of midshipmen; discrepancies obviously existing among that class of officers, in a degree far greater than in any other. I admit, also, that by some few, of peculiar temperaments and moral feelings, or of idiosyncratic insusceptibility, in physical constitution, to the impression of diffusible stimulants, the established quantity might be used without injury, and perhaps with apparent benefit; yet, on the other hand, it cannot be denied, that in some persons, a morbid liableness exists to be seriously affected even by small portions of this subtle stimulant. Between the insusceptibility and excessive sensibility noticed, various shades of both states intervene; but, so far as my observation extends, I must believe the average will always be found to present such characteristics of moral and physical constitutions, as to be generally influenced, and for the most part injuriously affected, by the quantity now established as part of the ration.

From this very difficulty of apportioning a healthful quantity of such a stimulus, to the diverse temperaments of the youthful class of officers in question, I would infer the inutility of any attempt at generalising the aggregate susceptibilities of constitution, by affixing any particular quantity of liquor, as innoxious. Still more embarrassing, nay fruitless, would be any endeavor to decide how much would be safe to all; and to fix upon



any gauge which would be positively useful to all, is impossible. Should these views be considered correct, it follows, that if, notwithstanding the disadvantageous circumstances attending the allowance of spirit in the ration, if it be still deemed fit that it be continued, it is evident that some measure, reconciling as far as possible, in all the different susceptibilities noticed, must be adopted. Hence the inference is irresistible, that, in gauging any particular quantity as the innocuous, safe, and useful standard allowance, with the design and expectation of meeting the aggregate condition of all, the embarrassment occurs, which has been suggested, and error and harm must result. If spirit be allowed, the quantity must be fixed.

If the quantity be fixed, injury of some kind will be inevitable to many, and serious evil to some is more than likely to occur, while jeopardy must result to all, owing to the hazard pertaining to a subject, beset with difficulties at every point. These are not only perplexing and important in their bearing, but amount nearly to a dilemma. They appear to me to designate, as the course of wisdom, the abolition of distilled spirit altogether, from the ration of midshipmen; thus, in commencing a formal disuse of a long established custom, operating with a salutary force on the minds and conduct of young and inexperienced officers, by the lesson of temperance, legally conveyed, in a deliberate act for their welfare.

The effect of such lesson might not only be prospective, but corrective of present evil, wherever it may exist in the Navy, unconfirmed by time and incorrigible vice. This it would do, by warning the reckless of their danger; and the vicious, should any exist, of the monitory notice bad habits had elicited in the councils of the country. Abandonment of a practice would most likely follow that authoritative discountenance of its disqualifying and ruinous consequences, which a deliberative investigation of its evil tendency in those councils, had prompted and promulgated. The question whether it would be wise to substitute any other kind of liquor in lieu of distilled spirit, now existing as part of the ration of the Navy, with intention to render such modified ration apposite to the moral and physical condition of midshipmen, appears directed by the resolution of the House of Representatives to the Navy Department, for decision. It might therefore seem to be transcending the instructions submitted to me by the department, to touch upon it.

It however may be deemed well worth the reflection, when that important question shall come to be considered, whether it be feasible to substitute any kind of liquor of a vinous\* or spirituous nature, which will certainly prove innocuous; and whether, in order to disencumber the ration completely of the mischievous items, for this class of officers, any thing more than the solid portions of wholesome aliment, and the ingredients of healthful dietetic beverages, as tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, surrogate, lemonade, &c. ought to enter into it. It may become, with benefit perhaps, an inquiry, whether the common ship's ration, which is the same as that drawn by, or allowed to midshipmen, be the best and fittest which might be devised, for this grade of officers, or even for the crews at large.

\* It has been proved by experiment, that a bottle of any of the strong dry wines, as Madeira, Wherry, or Port, contains about a *pint of proof Brandy*.

† It must not be forgotten that *boys* and *striplings* also form a proportion of crews, as well as officers of U. S. vessels. I have often known them, and even men, seriously injured by the present ration, (the spirituous portion.) See a work on Marine Hospitals and the Navy, by the writer of this report, 2d ed. article ration, section 10th, page 215.



The contemplated investigation of the merits of the liquid portion of the ration, might be considered opportune for such an inquiry. To me it appears plain, that a ration more wholesome and less gross, might be established for midshipmen. This would induce the officers of that grade to draw their subsistence in kind, at least at sea; thus rendering them more comfortable than they can now possibly be, subsisting on their present rations, and leaving them the liberty of laying in only such additional comforts as their pay or means might enable them to afford. I know not whether it be feasible to have two distinct rations. Should it be so decided, then the points just hinted at would be usefully taken into view. Should such a ration be established, it might also be drawn by assistant surgeons and other officers who mess in the steerage, and who now participate in the same inconveniences and want of comfort in diet, when they subsist on rations as midshipmen.

If it could be made to appear, that economy and comfort among young officers would be promoted by such a ration, and that it would be practicable to issue it; it doubtless might be deemed expedient to institute it.

Fourthly, The effect on the health of the individuals, should each midshipman use the quantity of distilled spirit now by law constituting a part of the daily ration.

This involves the question, 1st, whether the excessive indulgence of the natural passions, or their precocious development, during the period of adolescence, when they are already prone to undue excitement, has any prejudicial effect on the physical constitution? 2d, Whether the direct and daily application of a strong stimulant like spirit, in considerable quantity, to the stomach, does deteriorate the vigor and functions of that organ, thus depreciating, by the well-known inimical effects of its weakened tone on the system, the functional powers of the body generally, producing consequently imperfect health, premature disorder or disease, or both successively?

The physical health is always impaired in those who habitually indulge in uncontrolled passions. The permanent or transient injury to the constitution, which may accrue from this cause, will undoubtedly be owing, the first to the frequency of its repetition, the second to the infrequency of its recurrence.

It has been advanced, in the consideration of the *third* question, that the habitual use of spirit excites the passions unduly, and renders the temper wayward and perverse; and in the consideration of question *fifth*, (in the sequel) that it produces a state of moral feeling, contrarious to subordination. It therefore follows, for reasons of which the positions just stated are the true results, that the health of individuals among the class of midshipmen, who might daily consume their lawful allowance of distilled spirit, would be injured, and for reasons causing the injury and following it, that injured state of health would be incompatible with their own comfort and contentment, subversive of harmony with each other, as well as inimical to the interest of the service at large. The latter would just be in so far affected, as they might be dependent on the fortitude of its officers—a virtue quite as essential to the weal of the Navy as courage. That weal depends, not merely on the effective, but on the tranquil discharge of duties, with self satisfaction, and resignation to privations, under circumstances calculated to try the patience and health, and test the decorum of those uninjured to hardships or control.



The affirmative of the second question is founded in knowledge, trite and universal. The pernicious effects of ardent spirit, habitually and imprudently used, on the mucous tissues, stomach, liver, digestive functions, brain, nervous and muscular systems, in a word, on the active powers of life, are well known to every physician of even moderate experience.

Let the statistical accounts of temperance societies, public charities, and infirmaries, be consulted. Let the daily observation of any intelligent and reflecting person be appealed to. In fine, let the unwilling, undirected, appalling evidence of our senses, in our daily communication with the world, be trusted, and it will be conceded, that the injurious tendency of spirituous liquors on the powers of the system, is ascertained; their pernicious effects on the health of individuals addicted to the inordinate use of them, unquestionable and disastrous; and their demoralizing influence on those infatuated creatures enthralled by the engrossing love of them, unequivocal and mischievous.

The catenation of all the evils they produce, though seen every day, never loses its revolting effect on the mind. It leaves there the conviction that those evils imperiously call on the competent authorities to remove them, should they pervade the service of the Navy. Fifthly, whether the discipline of the Navy would be affected, and, in what manner and degree, should each midshipman consume daily his legal allowance of distilled spirits? What is this discipline? It supposes, in its legitimate sense, the implicit but harmonious obedience of the numerous individuals, composing the naval service, to the authoritative rule of those of all grades, senior to themselves, holding power to command for the time being, not only without murmuring, but without discontent or impatience. Surely discipline, in this extended, though true sense, is likely to be stained in its legal and efficient beauty, by any thing which approaches a morose or reluctant execution of orders, especially if the acquiescence be exactly of that vexatious kind, betrayed by certain perverse and contumelious dispositions, which is sufficiently visible to be offensive, and yet so vague and circumspect withal, as to be untangible. Is not this ungracious submission very likely to occur, among those, habitually indulging the caprices of temper, over which the reign of self-government is slackened and the curb of reason broken, by any cause, adequate to promote moral extravagance in the inexperienced and unwise? The vagaries of eccentric disposition would find no more ready way to discover their centrifugal direction from the circumference, enclosing propriety as its centre, than that which leads from ill-borne discipline to insubordination. Enough has already been advanced, to shew that the habitual use of spirit is such an exciting cause of passion, and such a depressing agent of the good health which carries as a concomitant, quietude of mind and urbanity of disposition, as to render it more than probable, that self-government would be in jeopardy by yielding to it, and therefore discipline affected. Indeed, the answers to the preceding questions grow out of the observations already detailed at length, and will be affirmative or negative, according as weight be attached to them or otherwise. If the demoralising effect of spirituous liquors, habitually used, be granted, will not the daily custom of using the distilled spirit of the present ration by midshipmen, on ship-board or elsewhere, tend to disharmonious wassails among them? Will not these, infrequent at first, be reiterated gradually, until each one who joined them in the mere buoyancy of youthful jollity, be seductively ensnared before he is aware of his danger: becom-



ing, from the natural issue of such a course, an absolute toper? Will not he be a brawler, under the influence of the pernicious cause of his ruin, who, but for the maddening lever of distempered conduct it ever carries with it, would have acted with becoming discretion and contentedness? In the compunctious grace of a sober moment of reflection, he may wail his lost reputation like Cassio, when it is too late to regain confidence, and like that self-examining lieutenant, deplore with heart struck regret, his folly and debasement which led him

———"To deceive so good a commander,  
With so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet  
An officer."

Nothing could be more pithy than Cassio's wonder,

"That we should with joy, revel,  
Pleasure, and applause, transform ourselves  
Into beasts!"

Or more true than his soliloquy,

"Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble?  
Swagger? swear? and discourse fustian  
With one's shadow? O thou invisible  
Spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to  
Be known by, let us call thee—devil."

How many a mortal strife, terminating in an instant one or both lives, to which the heart-strings of worthy parents and families have been fastened for years, and now in a moment snapped by overwhelming bereavement, has been the *sober* consequence of a *drunken* brawl! The perverted medium through which every thing contentious in such carousals is always viewed, lends, often with fatal issue, an obnoxiousness and fancied insult to innocent jest or sarcasm. Deadly umbrage is instantly taken, a challenge given in this temper, and accepted under irritated feelings. All this often occurs among friends. The next day, when soberness and reflection have regained their sway, they remember, like Cassio, after his drunken bout,

"A mass of things, but nothing distinctly;  
A quarrel, but nothing wherefore."

Yet they fight, and the consequence is such as suggested above. The trifling disputes on which disastrous consequences to whole families of worth and respectability; reproach to the Navy, as a service giving rise to such evils; and death or maiming to the rash individuals who have so causelessly thrown away their lives, and the happiness of their families, owe their origin, frequently, to intemperateness in drinking.

How evident then, that the deprecated but incorrigible evil of duelling in the Navy, would be lessened by any means which might render the recurrence of one of its fruitful causes more infrequent. I would not be understood to insinuate that all the duels succeeding so slight cause of quarrel, owe their origin to inebriation; for I know that the chivalrous spirit which swells the young bosom of a very sober person, may, and often does, lead him, from a misconceived sense of honor, and the reparation which may be due for slight injury, or even unpremeditated insult, recklessly to give or receive mortal defiance. But I have known also, the first position to be true, in several distressing instances. The habitual disposition to ire, petulance,



and, in some individuals, moroseness; in a word, ill temper of every character, engendered by habitually drinking spirit, by any grade of officers, must result in such peevish personal intercourse with equals, and discourteous obedience to the orders of superiors, as may, not only by the unfavorable effect of bad example, but by being liable to be pushed at any moment of fancied wrong, or actual discomfiture in the performance of arduous duty, a little beyond the suppressed and bursting point of sullen tolerance, quickly degenerate into insubordination. If these views be correct, how would it be possible, that the discipline of the Navy should not be involved among the numerous evils of intemperateness of all kinds, among officers of whatever grade, in which they might unhappily occur. Its preservation in legal and efficient purity, is intimately blended with that moral rectitude and harmonious resignation to the toils of duty by all, but particularly its young officers, which is essential to the peace, contentment, and happiness, of persons in a state of subordination and circumscribed liberty. Impatience or discontent in the governed thus situated, are like rough chains to the galled withers of the harnessed and mettlesome steed. Yet, impatience and discontent are the moral results of intemperate use in spirituous liquors. It is important to ensure that resigned acquiescence to subordination, and alacrity in the performance of duty, which are vital to the service, by every means in the sight of wisdom. Among the rest, will be, sedulously placing beyond the reach of the juvenile aspirant after glory and usefulness, any thing like a *legal invitation* to habits tending to sully the one; and to beget irregularities of behavior, and even imbecility of mind, incompatible with the other.

Sixthly, Whether the character of the Navy may be affected, and in what manner and extent, by each Midshipman consuming daily the quantity of spirit allowed by law, in the rations furnished by Government? This question asks another—Whether that character be in any degree prejudiced by a want of moral conduct in any of its officers, or be injuriously affected in the eyes of the world, or in fact, by an imperfect or reluctant discipline from any cause? This interrogatory involves no postulate. It is decidedly answered in the affirmative, by proof at command of every one of common sense. Whether a want of moral deportment or such constrained discipline can be owing to the use of ardent spirits, as a habit, among young officers, directly or remotely, is a problem not difficult of solution, at this period of the present discussion. The facts and reasonings which I have to offer on these two points of character and discipline, in reference to the habitual use of distilled spirits, are already embodied in this report, under different heads. It requires no uncommon powers of ratiocination to make the legitimate inference, if the premises be granted to be true. This will depend upon the degree of credence which all the foregoing positions and reasoning may be thought to deserve. If they be deemed fallacious, sophistical, or overstrained, then immorality and rebellious tolerance of necessary discipline would not be produced by ardent spirits, habitually used. But, if they be deemed valid and sufficient, the verity of my inductions must be admitted; and, since moral decrepitude and insubordinate conduct must then be ascribed, in some measure, to ardent spirits; it is fair to say, *the character of the Navy would be materially hurt, should each Midshipman consume the quantity of distilled spirits furnished in the rations supplied by Government.*

Having thus considered the main points embraced by the resolution of the House of Representatives, and exhibited the corollaries predicated on the several positions and courses of reasoning, growing out of that considera-



tion, a few general observations now naturally occur to me, as worthy of mention in this place.

I believe it is not uncommon for commanders of United States' ships of war to prohibit the Midshipmen of their vessels from drawing the spirit of their rations. I do not know whether any allowance be made, under such interdict, for the value of the liquor withheld. This information the Navy Department must be possessed of, through the returns of Pursers.\* But the fact itself, of prohibition, while it argues the inutility of that liquor, in the estimation of as many commanders as do interdict it, if it do not prove, even their opinion, that it is prejudicial, may be considered, by some, as sufficient to prevent the use or abuse of spirit among young officers. Those who think this, would, consequently, be apt to deem it a work of supererogation in the national legislature to abolish the liquid item by their fiat. So far from entertaining such an opinion, myself, I would suggest, whether the mere fact of Congress' abolishing this part of the ration of Midshipmen, would not be received by all concerned, especially those immediately the objects of such protective act, as imperatively discouraging the use of any liquid stimulus with their diet, under ordinary circumstances, during their official minority? When time, habit, and reflection, should have infixed such steadfastness in the principles of the mature man, that danger could neither accrue to himself, or injury to the service, from his proper use of wine, malt liquors, and occasionally even distilled spirit, *in great moderation*, then, either, or all, might be taken, under the chastened measure which early and long-continued habit of self-denial, has rendered not only easy to conform to, but palatable. Such temperate habits, so becoming and praiseworthy, would be practiced with entire safety to morals; compatibility with good health, and consonance with officer-like propriety. Such an act, by the Congress of our country, as that just alluded to, would manifestly inculcate, that self-denial and manly temperance were expected by that country, of her glory-loving and glory-giving sons; that those who were destined by profession to govern others, she expected first to be fully able to govern themselves; that those in whose trust she confided her high honors, she expected would do nothing calculated, in the acknowledged opinion of all the world, to render them unfit for that important trust.

Such expectations, conveyed in language which could neither be misunderstood nor disregarded, would set at ease the apprehensive bosom of many a parent, who devotes his son to the Naval service, with a dread of intemperance, only less distressing than the anguish he endures, when the object of his early care and present pride, shall actually have become addicted to that vice. Such a law, devised in wisdom, and executed with exemplary severity, would not only check, if any thing could do it, present evils, if such may be found to exist; but would prevent those who now constitute the junior officers of the service, from falling into the ruinous course of such of their seniors as may be obnoxious to the charge of intemperateness. I undertake not to say, there are any such; but if there be any, such law could doubtless suitably provide for them. They are deserving of the only rebuke which could simultaneously bring them to the sense of their folly, and relieve the service of the burden and bad example by which they oppress it.

In a state of things like this, parents would be encouraged to resign the control of their sons, at a period when their morals and habits most demanded *surveillance*, by placing them in a service where, by the laws, and

\* I believe the 4th Auditor has not always accounted in money, for parts of undrawn rations, though *always* of course for the *whole of such* as were not drawn.



rigorous enforcement of them, their moral safety was not equivocally provided for. Whereas, the law now permits the use of so large a portion of spirit, as to prove immoderate for the greater proportion of those who may use it, and destructive of the morals and health of nearly all who do so—thus justifying intemperance. It is submitted to the Navy Department, whether it can be wise to leave the disuse of spirit altogether to the discretionary interdict of commanders, on whom an ungracious responsibility is thus thrown, with the further disadvantage that what is left discretionary, may sometimes be omitted to be done. If evil exist under present circumstances and usages, the corrective, to be efficient, must be universal. Examine the prohibitory act of a commander of a ship, who declares his midshipmen shall not draw the spirit of their ration. It brings to light the fact, that he interdicts the use, by those officers, of that item which lawfully constitutes a part of the subsistence assigned to them as a modicum of their professional compensation. He will not allow them that, which the law, in its estimate of their compensation, declares they are entitled to receive; in other words, he withholds an integrant of that entire ration which the law has by its very letter and spirit decided, it is expected shall be daily consumed by them. But, besides this, the steerage often contains officers of the grade of midshipmen, of so old a date as to be on the eve of promotion, and in the full age of manhood; such, too, as have had their habits under good control. Such ought not to be taught, that distrust of their discretion and moderation is entertained by their commanders; and in an interdict among five, ten, or twenty officers, it would not be possible for exceptions to be supposed or pointed out. Indeed, such designation of exceptions would be still more unpopular, and perhaps unjust, than the general prohibition. In addition to this difficulty, the characters of the midshipmen are often unknown to a commander, until they shall have served with him some time. Their habits are equally beyond his ken. He might issue his interdict, when neither the character nor habits of the steerage officers would render it necessary; and, lucklessly, might suffer the subject to pass unnoticed, when both, in a majority of the whole number, should actually call for a prohibition. In every view of the subject, it appears to me plain, that the discretionary power now exercised in some ships by commanders, is not a sufficient safeguard against intemperateness; nor, indeed, a just disposal of the liquid part of the ration, unless its value in money be accounted for, to the credit of the individuals on the purser's books. It likewise is clear to me, that, notwithstanding the good motive which induces the commanders to exercise this assumed power; and notwithstanding the certain good effects which have followed that exercise, and the fact that it is the only corrective method the nature of the existing regulations admits of, to keep down an evil of magnitude and ruinous tendency, and one I fear on the increase rather than declension; still I am of opinion, that the importance of the subject demands, that this discretionary power should be superseded by some more efficient and universal corrective. In a word, I believe an act of Congress is called for, and would be important in its principle, and beneficial in its operation. All which is respectfully submitted by

WILLIAM P. C. BARTON.

PHILADELPHIA, *September 14, 1826.*



PHILADELPHIA, *September 12th, 1829.*

SIR: I have had the honor to receive your letter of the 25th May, enclosing a resolution, passed during the last Session of Congress, instructing you "to require three medical officers to report their opinions, separately, whether it is necessary or expedient that distilled spirits should constitute a part of the rations allowed to midshipmen; and, also, their opinion of the effect upon the morals and health of the individuals, and upon the discipline and character of the Navy, should each midshipman use the quantity of distilled spirits which now, by law, constitutes a part of the daily ration."

As one of the medical officers whom you have been pleased to designate for this duty, I have carefully bestowed all the attention to the subject which its great importance seems to demand. As the inquiries embraced in the resolution have a reference principally to the influence of ardent spirits on midshipmen, and only in a secondary manner, to its effects as transmitted through them on the character and discipline of the Navy, I shall proceed to discharge the duty required of me by considering the subject in the following order, viz:

- 1st. The effects of ardent spirits on the morals;
- 2d. On the health;
- 3d. On the character and discipline of the Navy;

And, lastly, The expediency and necessity of continuing distilled spirits as part of the daily ration to midshipmen.

These inquiries shall be separately considered, and in the order in which they are above presented:

The common sense of mankind might be cited as sufficient proof of the danger which the morals incur by the use of ardent spirits. I refer to public sentiment, because I conceive no stronger argument could be adduced against the practice in question; inasmuch as it has been formed by experience so common, and by observation so universal, that no error could have crept in to vitiate the judgment of mankind on this subject.

Arguments to prove that an intoxicated man is temporarily deprived of the full exercise of his reason, would be superfluous.

The real distinction—the *character* of man is his reason. If for that controlling and guardian power, he should substitute the delirium of intoxication, or ever so slight an approximation to it, the judgment either slumbers or is wholly suspended. He is now under the influence of an unrestrained or stimulated imagination, during which no safe limits are left to the immoral propensities and vicious actions of the unfortunate individual. The morality of a gentleman suffers a deep wound by a single act of intoxication. The coarse, ridiculous, or criminal thoughts engendered by such a state, are, sometimes, followed by sudden remorse and shame, though very different from the nature of repentance, and leading to repeated despicable violations, rather than to restoration of peace of conscience. Repeated acts of intoxication never fail to bring contempt on the sufferer. Embittered recollections are awakened by his own misconduct, the fire of professional ambition is extinguished, and he abandons, as a redemptionless and willing slave, all hope and prospect of future eminence, for the temporary relief and oblivion of a drunken stupor. The morals of such a person are ruined; his very moral faculty is annihilated; his patriotism, his military sense of honor, his esprit du corps, are all absorbed by the resistless desire for spirituous potations.



When ardent spirits are drunk to excess the faculties of the mind become seriously obtunded. This will not excite surprise when it is known, that the brains of drunkards exhibit, on dissection, a change of structure incompatible with a healthy and vigorous operation of the mind. Habitual excitation of this organ, by means of spirituous liquors, will as certainly injure its texture, and thus enfeeble its functions, as it will the tissues and functions of the stomach. Even when intoxicating liquors are drunk in what is styled moderation, or in such quantities as will admit of the regular operations of the mind and body, the ill effects are still observable. It is a common error to suppose that we inflict no injury upon ourselves when we drink in such quantities as to allow us perfect control over our thoughts, passions, and powers of locomotion. Even when we drink within these limits, we often find that it impairs the vigor of health, dulls the perceptions, weakens the judgment, and destroys all profitable reflection. In this state we become restless; books, the best safeguard to the morals of youth, cease to be either entertaining or instructive; time rolls heavily forwards; light society or deeper spirituous draughts are resorted to, until at last a fondness for intoxicating liquors is awakened, which terminates in a craving for it, which we have often not the ability to govern.

The effects of ardent spirits on the *health* are most destructive. It is indeed a fearful poison which, sooner or later, injures every tissue and organ within the reach of its influence. It is true, that the system in time becomes in some degree habituated to this article, so that its effects are felt to be pleasant, while its absence occasions pain and distress. To continue those pleasurable sensations, however, it is requisite gradually to increase the depth of the potations. This change in the natural desires is so gradual that the victim is not sensible of it, until he finds himself governed by a resistless craving which his discretion can no longer control.

This unmanageable desire for intoxicating liquors, and the intemperance connected with it, are viewed by a learned physician of Germany, as a *disease* which he denominates *Dipsomania*, a compound word, meaning insane thirst. There is no doubt, that, if ardent spirits be brought repeatedly in contact with the lining membrane of the stomach, it will produce a slow inflammation. This is evinced by thirst, indigestion, redness of tongue, tenderness over the region of the stomach, attended with depression of spirits, and obtuseness of intellect; which usually accompanies disorders of this organ. Though the stomach suffers most from being the immediate receptacle of the poison, yet such are its desolating properties, that almost every part of the body is injured by its baleful operation. Hence the intemperate are subject to diseases not only of the stomach, but the liver, intestines, heart, eyes, and brain. The effects of ardent spirits on the latter organ are evinced by the occurrence of nervous tremors, wakefulness, paralysis, epilepsy, apoplexy, melancholy, and madness. It also produces ulcerations, gout, rheumatism, and general dropsy. This last disease is a rare one among persons of strictly temperate habits.

All diseases and accidents are much more unmanageable in the drunkard than in those who practice abstinence. Accidents of various characters, which are perfectly remedial in the temperate, will have a fatal termination in the drunkard. Free drinkers are besides much more subject to disease than the abstemious, which arises from irregularity of diet, unnecessary and imprudent exposure to inclement weather, and from the direct agency of the hurtful draught itself.



It is a vulgar error to suppose that distilled spirits increase bodily strength. The prevalence of this erroneous opinion, has enticed men to drink them, from a belief that they are necessary to the well-being of the constitution. Young men often drink such articles, though they may at first be disagreeable to them, from an impression that they will protect from the ill effects of cold, and heat, and dampness, and miasma. So far, however, is this from being true, that the intemperate are known to suffer most from these causes. There is no fact, more satisfactorily established, than that the free drinker is the most liable to attack during the prevalence of epidemics.

Ardent spirits, without being taken in such quantities as to produce intoxication, often produce ill effects both on the body and mind. I have known persons destroyed by their use, who were never known to have been drunk. The practice, therefore, of issuing distilled spirits to Midshipmen is not attended with a single advantage. On the contrary, the tendency of such a practice is to enervate their bodies, to expose them to more frequent accidents and disease than would otherwise occur in a profession, exposed, perhaps more than all others to such dangers.

Of all the ills which are caused by spirituous liquors, none are so terrible or so well calculated to excite emotions of horror, as that of spontaneous human combustion. Numerous cases of this character are to be found in the records of medicine. The history of those cases is so well sustained by testimony, that even the incredulous can now no longer doubt. Some of them were submitted to the test of judicial investigation, and were found supported by all the proof required to form human testimony.

All the eminent professional gentlemen who have reported these cases, concur in the statement, that spontaneous human combustion occurs only in the habitual drunkard. Whether the human body is rendered combustible by being pervaded by alcoholic vapors, or by an unusual development of inflammable gases, such as corburetted hydrogen, or phosphoretted hydrogen, is difficult to determine. There is high authority for both these opinions, and under particular conditions of the system, brought about by gross intemperance, we might readily conceive of the occurrence of such anomalies from either cause. Anatomists have observed, upon opening the dead bodies of drunkards, the escape of a gas, which will inflame when brought in contact with a candle, and in some instances by simple admixture with atmospheric air.

The effects of drinking ardent spirits, on "the character and discipline of the Navy," are generally admitted to be injurious. A distinguished officer assured me that a great majority of the disturbances that occasionally occur in the ships' crews, arise from too free an indulgence in this vice. Nor should this excite surprise. If ardent spirits will make one individual gay, a second gloomy, a third taciturn, a fourth garrulous, a fifth amicable, and a sixth quarrelsome, it could be scarcely expected that harmony should prevail.

When such a variety of temperament and disposition is awakened by intoxicating liquors, in connexion with that loss of judgment which usually occurs in the intemperate, we may expect misunderstandings and insubordination. Whenever excess in drinking produces nervous tremors, as it frequently does, it produces a corresponding timidity. Hence the courage of an habitual drunkard cannot be relied on. Though spirituous draughts may for a time excite insensibility to danger, yet, if long and freely used, they as certainly weaken the moral energies as they do the mental functions. If



these intoxicating liquors produce the effects above stated, they cannot have other than a most injurious bearing on the character and discipline of the Navy. There are few officers in the Navy, of any grade, prepared to admit the "necessity or expediency of continuing distilled spirits 'as a part of the rations of Midshipmen.'"

The commanders of our national vessels, who are generally as anxious to guard the morals as to improve the professional qualifications of this class of officers, always discountenance the practice of their drinking ardent spirits. Hence they, and indeed the officers generally, draw the value of the ration in money, and therefore admit into their messes none of the articles furnished by the Government for the ship's use. There are, however, some exceptions to this custom, particularly during long cruises, when the private stores become exhausted. On these occasions the ship's rations are drawn, including whiskey, thus tempting the young officers to drink until a fondness for it is frequently created. Though at first offensive, it becomes in time agreeable to the taste, and the practice ends by an irresistible desire to be constantly under its influence.

In my judgment, there is no situation in which a young officer could be placed, which would render the use of spirituous liquors either necessary or expedient. They are no preventive of disease; they afford no protection against either heat or cold; they are no supporters of strength. On the contrary, they weaken the constitution, dull the perceptions, destroy all disposition to profitable study, and thus render many promising young officers unfitted for the profession on which they have embarked.

It is not by injuring the health and morals of Midshipmen, alone as such, that the daily ration of ardent spirits appears to be objectionable. They rise to the highest rank, by gradual promotion, and therefore, are educated for important and responsible commands, by passing through all the gradations of the service. An intemperate Midshipman will not become a temperate Lieutenant or Captain. It would be, therefore, painful to reflect on the possible results of important enterprises, conducted by individuals whose judgments had been impaired, and energies enfeebled, by unrestrained indulgence.

Example is a powerful engine in all human actions; and its influence here, on the character and discipline of the Navy, ought not to be overlooked. The subordinate looks up to his superior as a director and pattern, and the color of his own conduct will partake largely of that which constantly passes before him. If the superior should be intemperate, which happily is a most rare occurrence in our Navy, those under his command, disposed to intoxication, will cease to consider the act either criminal or unofficer-like. The hurtful operation of such an example extends to the lowest ranks of the service, and opposes an insurmountable obstacle to every effort at reform.

The advantage accruing to the nation would be inestimable, if this vice could be wholly eradicated from this great arm of national defence. To accomplish this desirable end, it would be certainly wise to commence, by abolishing the existing legal sanction to intemperate drinking. The present temperate habits of our Midshipmen afford no argument against the adoption of this measure. The law allows the youngest, and most inexperienced of them, a half a pint of distilled spirits daily. If the salutary advice of their superiors, added to their own good sense, prevents them, in a great majority of instances, from using the legal privilege which has been given to them, still there may be some, who are not thus influenced, and therefore,



the necessity exists of removing the national invitation to an indulgence so pernicious.

Though our officers, in general, are as temperate as an equal number of citizens in any other situation in life, yet it is in vain to conceal, that there are too many, among the junior officers particularly, who drink more than is consistent either with health or sound morals. It should be, therefore, a matter of congratulation, that the energies of government are about to bear on this point. If there be any thing now which can arrest the Navy in its career of usefulness and glory, it is the deadly atmosphere which is diffused around it by this desolating poison.

Though called upon to express an opinion regarding the use of ardent spirits for Midshipmen, I may yet be pardoned for suggesting, that the inquiry might be advantageously extended to an examination of its effects on the boys and young men, who compose the crews of our national vessels. The baneful practice of serving out grog to this class of persons, and thus making them habitual drinkers, is, perhaps, the chief cause of the general intemperance among sailors. The law makes no distinction, as respects the ration, between the old sailor and the boy. Each is allowed, daily, a half a pint of whiskey. Many of our commanders, it is true, prohibit boys from receiving their ration of spirits. The young men, however, are not subject to this deprivation. They consequently, with very few exceptions, drink their ration of spirits, and thus as certainly contract a fondness for it, as that effect will follow cause. There are few men, who drink a half pint of spirits, daily, for three years, which is the ordinary period of enlistment, who will not become, at the expiration of this time, not only fond of it, but whose craving for it will be not less resistless than for their ordinary allowance of substantial food. There is, besides, no youth unaccustomed to the use of ardent spirits, who can drink half a pint without becoming more or less intoxicated. I have more than once heard young sailors offer as an excuse for the crime of intoxication, that they had drunk no more than their legal ration. In many instances, the declaration was, doubtless, perfectly true. How preposterous then, is it, by law, to allow a youth as much spirit as will make him drunk, and afterwards, by virtue of another law, to punish him for complying with the provisions of the first! The daily ration of half a pint of distilled spirits, is, therefore, unnecessarily and injuriously large for young men, and the quantity might be advantageously diminished for veteran seamen.

Let those who contend that ardent spirits are useful in the army and navy, recollect, that, for a long and interesting period, this article was entirely unknown. During this space, men were as enterprising, and possessed as much firmness of purpose, as they do in the present age.

The Roman armies withstood, for centuries, the furious onsets of their enemies, without using any drink stronger than water, with an occasional admixture of wine and vinegar. If they could perform prodigies of valor, and surmount obstacles which few moderns would dare to encounter, without spirituous liquors, why should they now be deemed necessary?

The enthusiastic disciples of the *Koran* have desolated empires, without the use of intoxicating potations. Even the abstemious Mahomedans of the present day, though inferior to their European enemies in military science, are yet quite their equals in courage, and ability to endure fatigue and privations.



It is, indeed, generally admitted by experienced officers, both of this country and of Europe, that water drinkers are not only the most worthy of confidence, but the most subordinate, the most healthy, and the most capable of enduring the varied exposures of a military life. The testimony upon this point is strong and conclusive.

As the use of ardent spirits, then, exercises so injurious an influence on the health, morals, and discipline of the navy, an advantageous effort might be made, to diminish at least the quantity of it, which is consumed by the crews of our national vessels. I am aware, that, to prohibit the use of this article in our navy, would be an unpopular, and, perhaps, an impracticable measure. It would be one, indeed, to which old sailors would not readily submit. It might, therefore, be advisable to confide a reformation of this character to the management of our intelligent commanders. By giving wholesome advice; by substituting tea and coffee, or other healthful articles not embraced in the ration; by giving those who abstain from spirits, the value of it in money; and by rewarding them, at the same time, with marks of confidence, a salutary change to more temperate habits, might be frequently effected. Even veteran sailors might, in some instances, be persuaded to relinquish what they at present consider the most valuable part of their ration.

It is often proposed to substitute for ardent spirits, either vinous or malt liquors, as being less injurious. It should be recollected, however, that alcohol is contained in, and is the principle of, all intoxicating drinks. Drunkenness, by whatever cause produced, is both physically and morally destructive.

Malt liquors, such as porter and ale, produce the worst species of drunkenness. In addition to their intoxicating properties, they contain certain noxious ingredients, which are added for the purpose of affording them a bitter and lively taste. To the hops, which are slightly narcotic, are frequently added opium, coculus indicus, &c. &c. When such potations are drunk to excess, the face becomes bloated and stupid, and in a majority of instances, drunkards from this cause, die suddenly with apoplexy, or palsy. If they escape these diseases, swelled liver and dropsy terminate their career.

The effects of drinking malt liquors to excess, are less rapidly injurious, than those produced by ardent spirits; yet they are more lasting, and less easily removed. The almost invariable effect of this drink is to render even the most sprightly intellects dull and sluggish.

Those who would preserve the health and temperate habits of our youth, should withhold from them every species of intoxicating liquor. At all events, they should not be allowed the daily habit of drinking. An occasional indulgence to excess, in stimulating drink, will, in a majority of instances, excite disgust. It is only by drinking them habitually, and in moderate quantities, that the stomach craves them, and our desire for them becomes irresistible. Though many resort to inebriating drinks, with the ill-judged view of alleviating mental anguish; yet the number who have been thus rendered drunkards is small indeed, compared with those who have contracted a fondness for them, by habitual moderate drinking. Whether this destructive practice is commenced by the invitation of a fond and unreflecting parent, by a desire in our youths to imitate their seniors in what is deemed a manly custom, or by virtue of our existing naval laws, it frequently has a most injurious tendency, unless checked by timely admonition, by the early occurrence of disease, or by that exalted self-control which but too few possess.



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It is thus that the most talented and generous youth of our country, particularly if they possess warm and jovial temperaments, if not destroyed by intoxicating drinks, have, at least, their minds so stupified, as often to exhibit, throughout the remainder of their existence, the spectacle of feeble and unambitious sluggards.

I have the honor to be,  
Very respectfully,

THO. HARRIS.

The Hon'ble JOHN BRANCH,  
*Secretary of the Navy.*

